
N E I G H B O R H O O D
O V E R V I E W

Neighborhood Overview

History

Neighborhood Nine comprises a large area of the original Cambridge community, founded in 1631 as “Newtowne” and centered on what is now Harvard Square. The settlement was chosen as capital of the Massachusetts Bay Colony because of its rich farm land, its comparative safety from assault at sea, and for its good access to the colony’s agricultural plantations. This access also made Newtowne, later Old Cambridge, a village center for surrounding agricultural areas in nearby communities, such as Brighton, Arlington, Lexington and Newton.

During the early colonial era, the Cambridge Common extended into much of present day Neighborhood Nine. The Common was a large tract of land in community hands that was open to common uses, such as grazing, but also to private subdivision for farms. It was bounded on one side by the Great Road, or present-day Massachusetts Avenue, still a major boundary defining the neighborhood. As demand for farm land and house lots expanded, the village partitioned what is now Avon Hill into 24 small farms in the area defined by Garden, Linnaean and Raymond Streets. Settlement extended as far as the edges of the Great Swamp, or Alewife.

Though agriculture would continue to be the primary pursuit of most residents for centuries, the establishment of Harvard College in 1636 changed the neighborhood’s character — and the city as a whole — for good. Harvard was then as now an educator, an employer and a magnet for new residents. In the colonial era, the college attracted

wealthy settlers such as shipping merchants, plantation owners and others. Residents of more modest means also expanded the population, including Irish immigrants who came to work the clay pits and brick yards in the nineteenth century. New settlement and industry were also facilitated by the construction of bridges to Boston and railroad links to the west. The neighborhood’s northwest section developed rapidly and Porter Square became a major regional crossroads. Residential development spread along Massachusetts Avenue. By the early decades of the twentieth century, Neighborhood Nine was largely built up, barring open spaces around Fresh Pond and the old clay pits.

While the overall layout of the neighborhood has changed little in this century, important developments have continued to shape its character and composition. The former clay pits were capped and converted into the city’s dump. This fifty acre parcel would eventually be transformed into Danahy Park. Industrial parcels along the B&M railroad tracks are now vacant, and in some cases have given way to residential uses. Mixed income residential developments, such as Walden Square and the Cambridge Housing Authority’s (CHA) Lincoln Way apartments, were constructed, increasing the social diversity of the neighborhood. Expansion on the periphery of the neighborhood also changed the character of Neighborhood Nine. For instance, Harvard and Lesley College have expanded their student population and associated facilities, while retail developments such as the Porter Square Shopping Center have affected the commercial mix and the traffic patterns in the neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD NINE TODAY:

A Demographic Profile

POPULATION

Neighborhood Nine is the city's most populous neighborhood. The 1990 Census counted 11,126 residents, an increase of nearly 500 people. While this growth is the largest of any Cambridge neighborhood over the decade, it represents a small percentage increase for the neighborhood, only about four percent over the count for 1980.

AGE

Trends and patterns in age distribution of the neighborhood are very similar to those found in the city as a whole. The population is aging, but there has been a small increase in infants and toddlers occurring as well. The population bulges in the "middle" or in the age group 35-44. Nearly one in five Neighborhood Nine resident falls into this group, compared to one in six citywide, and in both cases it is the fastest growing age group. More residents are entering their child bearing years: infants and toddlers (aged 0-4) increased by 41%. An aging population is also indicated by sharp increases in the population aged 45-64. Consistent with citywide trends, Neighborhood Nine has fewer school age children than in previous decades, while the level of seniors (65 and up) has remained stable.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

One in eight neighborhood residents are dormitory residents of Harvard University. In U.S. Census terms, they live in "group quarters," while the rest of the population live in households. In 1990, 11% of Neighborhood Nine's total population lived in group quarters.

In 1990, the household composition of Neighborhood Nine mirrored the city as a whole, with more people living as "non-family households" than as families (61% vs. 39%). (*"Families" are households of two or more persons related by marriage, birth or adoption; "non-family" households are singles living alone or unrelated adults living together as roommates.*)

Most of the non-family households in the neighborhood consist of single people living alone (82%). Fully one half of all neighborhood households fit this description. Neighborhood Nine has a greater share of singles, and a smaller share of families, than does the city as a whole. Over the decade 1980-1990, the numbers of single parent households declined while couples with children increased. Households with children (both two parent and single parent) represent a greater share of the households north of Upland Road than in homes to the south.

Percent of Households with Families

	1980	1990
Neighborhood Nine	39.06%	38.53%
Cambridge	44.87%	44.97%

Source: 1980, 1990 U.S. Census

LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

Neighborhood Nine residents are highly mobile, like their citywide neighbors. Nearly half, or 48%, lived in different houses in 1985 and 1990, identical to citywide proportions. The neighborhood, however, shows signs of increasing residential stability. Forty-six percent of the population aged five or older lived in the same house five years previously, up from 41% in 1980. This trend is more pronounced than citywide patterns.

RACE

Nearly one in four residents of Neighborhood Nine is either non-white or Hispanic, up from a 19% minority population in 1980. Over the decade, the Asian population doubled, while Hispanics increased by more than half, comparable to citywide trends. The Black population remained stable, comprising 15% of the area's population. There is greater racial diversity north of Upland Road than in the southern section of the neighborhood. About eight in ten residents south of Upland is White, compared to 56% of those north of Upland. In comparison, nearly 40% of residents north of Upland are Black, compared to just six percent of all those living to the south.

FOREIGN BORN

Increased cultural diversity is also reflected in a rising share of immigrants from abroad living in the neighborhood. In 1990, close to 2,000 persons, or about 17% of all residents, were foreign born, up from 13% in 1980. Twenty-eight percent of the population north of Upland Road is foreign born, compared to 16% of those living south of Upland.

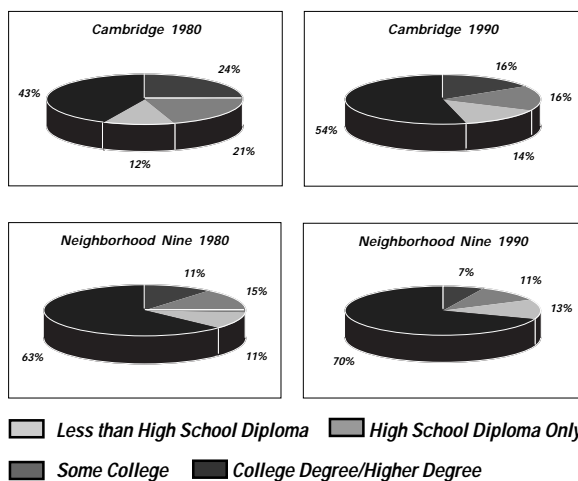
LANGUAGES SPOKEN

Diversity of languages has also increased in Neighborhood Nine. Seventeen percent of those aged five and up speak a language other than English at home, compared to 12% in 1980. The numbers speaking other languages increased by over half; only two other neighborhoods (North Cambridge and Area Four) had greater proportions of change in linguistic diversity. Among the languages heard in Neighborhood Nine these days are Creole, French, Portuguese and Chinese. A greater share of North of Upland residents speak languages other than English at home.

EDUCATION

Neighborhood Nine residents are, on the whole, extremely well educated. Seven in ten persons aged 25 or older have a college degree or higher education, up from 63% in 1980. Among residential neighborhoods, only Agassiz has higher levels of educational attainment. In comparison, 54% of all city residents aged 25 and up have college degrees or higher. Educational attainment is somewhat unevenly distributed between residents living North and South of Upland Road, however, with 59% of those on the north side attaining college degrees or more education, compared to 84% on the south side.

Neighborhood Nine Educational Levels



Source: 1980, 1990 U.S. Census

INCOME

Only two other city neighborhoods, Agassiz and Neighborhood Ten, had median family incomes higher than Neighborhood Nine. Neighborhood Nine continues to be one of the city's more affluent areas, with incomes well above the citywide norm. At \$52,721, neighborhood families' incomes were a third higher than family median incomes citywide, at \$39,990. The median income for all *households* (\$36,608) was close to the citywide median income of \$33,140 in 1980. This figure is more reflective of the area's income distribution, since it includes the 60% of resident households who are not living as families.

Neighborhood Nine incomes are unevenly distributed by geography and race. Residents living south of Upland Road are almost twice as likely to earn higher incomes (over 120% of area median income), while residents north of Upland are twice as likely to earn lower incomes (at or below 50% of median income.) White residents are twice as likely as Blacks to earn higher incomes.

Neighborhood Nine Median Family Income*

	1980	1990	% Change
Neighborhood Nine	\$41,249	\$52,721	28%
Cambridge	\$31,943	\$39,990	25%

Source: 1980, 1990 U.S. Census

**all figures are adjusted to 1990 dollars*

Neighborhood Nine Median Household Income*

	1980	1990	% Change
Neighborhood Nine	\$30,845	\$36,608	19%
Cambridge	\$25,438	\$33,140	30%

Source: 1980, 1990 U.S. Census

**all figures are adjusted to 1990 dollars*

Conclusion

Census data and telephone survey results reveal that Neighborhood Nine residents are comparatively well educated, well paid and increasingly rooted. While half of the area's households are occupied by singles living alone, more residents are starting families and settling for longer periods here. The neighborhood has become more racially and culturally diverse in recent years. There is also considerable internal diversity between sections of the neighborhood. The areas north and south of Avon Hill, marked roughly by Upland Road, differ along racial, educational and socioeconomic lines.

Neighborhood Nine is faced with a variety of challenges as the country moves into the 21st century. The following discussion outlines recommendations in Land Use and Zoning, Transportation, Housing, Economic Development and Employment, Open Space, and Public Safety to assist the community in meeting those challenges.

A N A L Y S I S A N D R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

Land Use, Zoning and Urban Design

Background

The zoning ordinance is the city's chief tool for planning and regulating land use. While the zoning ordinance remains the city's clearest statement of land use policy, it cannot solve all development problems that arise. For example, goals for the quality of design are sometimes expressed in guidelines that supplement the ordinance. The quality of the city's environment rests on factors such as landscaping, scale, materials and building design, as well as the integration of open space and pedestrian connections with the built environment. While some portions of the city are regulated by specific design and development standards, such as Harvard Square and North Massachusetts Avenue, many critical areas are not covered by such guidelines.

Cambridge also utilizes its Building Code, Fire, Health and Safety Codes, Historic District designations and Flood Plain, Wetlands and Environmental regulations to govern development. These tools, along with zoning, are based on powers delegated to local government by the Commonwealth.

Individual zoning categories regulate land uses by specifying permissible (or prohibited) uses, required setbacks, height limitations, density (floor area ratio (FAR) or lot area per dwelling unit), required open space, parking requirements and signage regulations.

In the Zoning Ordinance, 14 of the city's 39 zoning categories are used to determine permissible land uses within the boundaries of Neighborhood Nine. The following zoning districts are

applicable to parts of Neighborhood Nine: Open Space, Residence A-1, Residence A-2, Residence B, Residence C-1, Residence C-3, Office-1, Business A-1, Business A-2, Business A, Business C, Industry A-1, Industry A (see attached map).

These categories reflect an evolution in zoning and land use policy, prompted by neighborhood and government concern with density, height and other issues. A number of the residential zones were downzoned in the 1960s and 70s from higher density classifications - such as Residence C1 and C2 to Residence B - strongly limiting the amount of new development that would be possible. As the Red Line subway was being extended north from Harvard Square in the 1970's and 1980's, new commercial zones were crafted for the Massachusetts Avenue corridor (Business BA-2) and Porter Square (Business BC) to curb allowable height and density.

The neighborhood is mainly residential in its interior, from Avon Hill and the streets closest to Harvard Square on the south, to the sections closest to Danahy Park on the north. The Residence C-3 zone near Harvard Square allows the greatest density, as well as unlimited height. Other residential zones in the neighborhood limit FAR to 0.5 or 0.75 and height to 35 feet.

Commercial and industrial zones occupy the periphery of the neighborhood, represented by the Massachusetts Avenue and Concord Avenue corridors, and the Industrial A-1 zone along the railroad tracks. The Business districts allow retail, office and residential uses; allowable height and density are lower than those in force in some of

the city's other business zones, such as Harvard or Central Squares. The Industry A-1 district allows light manufacturing and warehouse uses, such as self-storage facilities.

Open space zones, represented mainly by Danehy Park and St. Peter's Field, cover over 50 acres on the neighborhood's northern section. The other important land use in Neighborhood Nine is institutional, represented by Harvard/Radcliffe properties and by the Smithsonian Observatory on Concord Avenue.

Survey Results

In the 1993 Atlantic telephone survey, over two-thirds (68%) of the neighborhood's respondents thought that developments over the past five to ten years in Cambridge have had a positive impact. Fifteen percent view these developments as having a negative impact. This viewpoint is consistent across all demographic groups, including race, income, education and housing status (owners versus renters.) Among the impacts seen by residents were more jobs, increased tax base, greater choice among stores and improved appearance for the city. Negative impacts of development seen by some residents included overcrowding, increased commercialism, and too much traffic among other concerns. Residents with a negative view of development were somewhat more likely to be longer term residents (over five years) in the neighborhood.

Most residents (73%) felt that they were not adequately informed about development plans about the neighborhood. While this view was consistent for all demographic groups, it was especially high among racial minorities: 89% of Blacks and 94% of Asians did not feel they knew enough about development. Renters were considerably more likely to feel uninformed than homeowners, as were low to moderate income residents, and those without a college education. Respondents preferred to be informed about development via printed media such as newsletters, flyers and newspaper articles.

Committee Discussions

In general, Study Committee members were concerned with how to match the scale of businesses, land uses and economic development in the neighborhood. Members discussed the need to maintain larger businesses in proximity to major traffic arteries, while promoting smaller scale uses along the neighborhood's secondary arteries. Members wished to see more pedestrian-oriented small businesses. They acknowledged issues of clean air and appropriate scale along with concerns about jobs and employment.

Land use and design issues in specific sections of the neighborhood were discussed as well. Regarding Massachusetts Avenue, participants raised concerns about noise, traffic congestion and delivery vehicles. There was concern that the city's major artery had been mismanaged and poorly planned at times. This roadway embodies much of the "good and bad of urban living" for Study Committee members. Also discussed was the retail and commercial mix along Massachusetts Avenue, including the number of liquor licenses issued. Some suggested the need for "greening" the streetscape and making it a more pleasant meeting place as well as a location for commerce. Study Committee members also desired that the city take a more proactive stance towards commercial business and property owners in the area. They spoke of the need to nurture small businesses serving neighborhood needs.

Concerning the Residence C-3 zone closest to Harvard Square, members wished to ensure that nearby residential neighborhoods were protected and that transitions between zones of differing uses and densities were smooth. Study Committee members also saw potential for design improvements in Porter Square, primarily by making retail and other uses besides parking more visually predominant, and placing parking below ground. A similar concern was raised about Concord Avenue, with the suggestion that parking directly in front of buildings be discouraged.

Recommendations

Land Use Recommendations

- I. Evaluate what kind of redevelopment, if any, should take place in light industrial areas if the opportunity arises.***
- II. Consider the following changes in the Industry A-1 zoning district:***
 - Amend the zoning ordinance to require a special permit, issued by the Planning Board, for all development proposals in the zoning district. As part of the permitting process, the Planning Board should encourage residential use on the parcel at Sherman Street and along Concord Avenue at the Fresh Pond rotary (because of the proximity of Danehy Park and Tobin School). Commercial and light industrial use may be accommodated closer to the rail spur and Fresh Pond Shopping Mall.
- III. Modifying the residence C-3 zoning district as follows:***
 - Develop design guidelines for the Residence C-3 districts surrounding Harvard Square to protect adjacent lower density residential neighborhoods and to provide a smooth transition between zoning districts of different character.
- IV. Consider design changes in Porter Square:***
 - The owners of the Porter Exchange should redevelop the parking lots to make them visually appealing and with uses that serve the neighborhood. Possibilities include placing either a park, housing, or retail above ground with parking underneath.

V. Improve Concord Avenue as follows:

- Discourage parking in front of the buildings or visible from the main street.

Urban Design Recommendations

While a number of these recommendations are also found in the Open Space, Economic Development or Transportation sections of this report, Study Committee members felt that they were also vital to the topic of Urban Design, which requires an integrated approach to development.

- I. As part of the Open Space Plan, the city should encourage commercial and residential property owners along Massachusetts Avenue and Concord Avenue and the corner of Walden and Sherman Streets to convert available area (small sites) to open space***
 - Small sites could be landscaped and benches installed.
 - Give special consideration to the corner of Sherman and Walden Streets(Masse's Corner) to give it definition.
 - Consider ways to reward property owners for not over-developing space that is currently open and consider tax breaks for limited public access to private open space.
- II. The city should consider placing benches and trash receptacles along streets throughout the neighborhood in locations that do not impede pedestrian flow.***
- III. Encourage the following design improvements***

to Porter Square

- The owners and manager of the Star Market/ Porter Square Shopping Center should landscape the parking lot (with no loss of parking spaces) making it less of an eyesore and more appealing.
- The owners of the Porter Exchange should redevelop the parking lots to make them visually appealing and with uses that serve the neighborhood. Possibilities include placing either a park, housing or retail above ground with parking underneath.
- Encourage programs and projects that make the area around the Fresh Pond Shopping Center more pedestrian-friendly by encouraging appropriate types of sidewalks and other pedestrian paths; planting trees and other vegetation; and installing benches, traffic lights, and other pedestrian amenities.
- Include open space requirements in redevelopment of larger spaces, such as Cambridge Storage, as well as mixed-income housing and retail activity that serve the immediate residents.
- Public Works, Commonwealth Electric and Nynex should collaborate on development of a single pole that would incorporate telephone wires and directional signs.

IV. Take an integrated approach to planning Massachusetts Avenue, with research and improvements in the following areas:

- Study problems of traffic flow, noise and loading zones; types of businesses desired in this area; strategies to encourage them; urban design improvements such as benches, open spaces, bicycle path and pedestrian crossings; means of making the area more livable.
- Place emphasis on making Massachusetts Avenue a pedestrian oriented neighborhood shopping area; plant trees, grass, and perhaps flowers along the center strip from Everett Street to the railroad bridge at Porter Square; encourage businesses to have more plantings in front of their stores- possibly boxed plants;

install benches where practical; consider encouraging development of outdoor dining facilities by existing establishments (zoning code could give bonuses to encourage this development); (encourage the License commission to give occupancy increases if the increased seats are outdoors); keep Massachusetts Avenue and Porter Square liquor license caps in place.

- Suggested areas for benches/enhanced landscaping: in front of Porter Exchange, in front of the Congregational Church and in areas that are practical and that do not impede pedestrian flow.
- Explore the feasibility of landscaping the median strip, not necessarily with trees and grass, but possibly other durable, low maintenance planting material. Consider having the parking meters along Massachusetts Avenue go into effect at 9:00 or 9:30 am. Look at what impact parking in the area has on the smaller businesses.
- Consider eliminating 15 minutes meter zones.
- More enforcement of double parked cars to ease congestion and promote flow of traffic on Richdale and Walden.
- Study the record of tickets issued to determine if any particular times of the day have an especially high rate of illegal parking; if so, follow up with tougher enforcement.
- Study size of trucks allowed on neighborhood streets.
- Study loading zone areas along Massachusetts Avenue, and at Walden and Richdale Avenue: Look at hours of operation, restrictions, enforcement, etc.
- Explore opportunities for cluster parking to allow alternative uses on the street, such as dedicated bus lanes and bicycle lanes.
- Explore the possibility of dedicated bus lanes for Massachusetts Avenue.
- Do a survey of current and potential users and trip purposes along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor.

VI. The city, neighborhood residents and businesses must work together to foster a good mix of commercial retail uses along Massachusetts Avenue that serve local needs such as drug stores, convenience stores, shoe repairs, dry cleaning, hardware, small clothing stores, toy stores, family and affordably priced restaurants

- There is insufficient parking along Massachusetts Avenue and in Porter Square for these to be satisfactory regional or destination retail areas.
- Massachusetts Avenue should not become “restaurant row” or have a concentration of businesses in the same field such as the furniture concentration around Putnam Square, nor should it have a concentration of craft shops, boutiques, tee shirt shops and similar shops principally aimed at peoples’ discretionary rather than necessity spending; limited destination shopping is preferable.
- Conduct a survey of businesses to determine where patrons come from.
- Look at incentives such as real estate tax exemptions to assist local businesses.
- Resolve issues of commercial delivery and trash pick-up times so as to minimize rush hour traffic delays and disruption to neighbors.

VII. Consider having city public works crews remove snow on sidewalks along Massachusetts Avenue and along all the city’s major corridors and squares.

Growth Policy Context

A number of policies in the city’s Growth Policy document, *Towards a Sustainable Cambridge*, are relevant to issues and areas of concern expressed by the Neighborhood Nine Study Committee. The need to accommodate light industrial uses, such as storage, is discussed in Policy 12. The general principle of maintaining the scale and character of the city’s existing residential and retail areas is addressed in Policies 1 and 2. Policies 4 and 62 call for providing adequate transitions between differing scales of development and differing uses. Changes within evolving industrial areas such as the Industry A-1 district are addressed in Policies 9 and 10, which call for selective residential reuse, where appropriate, and measures to limit the impacts of industrial districts on existing residential neighborhoods. Policies 34, 35, 38 and 39 recognize the value of these areas as a resource, and suggest the need for careful planning within flexible guidelines to utilize them while minimizing disruption to neighborhoods.

Policy 66 recommends that new open space be accommodated in private developments where feasible. Landscaping and other suggested improvements to streetscape and retail environments such as Massachusetts Avenue, Concord Avenue and Porter Square are the subject of Policy 60, which recommends that urban design standards be crafted for all areas subject to future development or redevelopment. Policy 47 calls for strengthening existing retail districts, while Policy 48 discusses recognition and encouragement of their unique assets.